



HISTORY IN BRICK AND STONE

LETTERS TO A LADY,

EMBODYING

A Popular Sketch of the History of Architecture,
AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF
THE VARIOUS STYLES WHICH HAVE PREVAILED.*

My dear Scyllah:

I AM almost disposed to hope that you re-proach me for my long silence, as I must otherwise fear that you have not found our story so interesting or useful as I hoped you would,—and I always prefer hope to fear, it carries you more buoyantly and pleasantly through the waters in which we are all struggling. If you have not found interest in this look-back into the past,—the “unrelenting Past,”—where

“Far in her realm withdrawn,
Old Empires sit in sullenness and gloom,
And glorious ages gone,
Lie deep within the shadow of her womb!”

it is my fault, and not the fault of the subject. From Egypt and her mummy, of which will you let me say,—

“Perchance that very hand, now pinion’d flat,
Has bob-a-nobb’d with Pharaoh glass to glass,
Or dropp’d a halfpenny in Homer’s hat,
Or do’d his own to let Queen Dido pass,
Or held, by Solomon’s own invitation,
A torch at the great temple’s dedication,—”

down to the present day, the story is continuously curious and curiously continuous. It is a look-back, too, which will not tend to weaken our confidence or lessen our strivings, but should rather awaken us to a fuller knowledge of our powers, and arouse our dormant energies; which should lead to greater doings by showing what has already been done.

I gave you, in my last, the broad divisions of Gothic architecture, and promised to put before you the more obvious means of discriminating them. In the Early English or Lancet style—its first phase (“architecture ogivale primitive,” as Caumont calls it), the arches are acute, lancet-shaped, in fact, as you see them in this example of a triple window, fig. 25, and the openings are long and narrow.

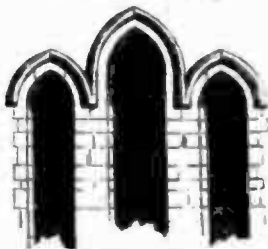


FIG. 25.—WINDOW, LANCET STYLE.

At first they were used singly; but later in the style two or more of these lancet openings were placed together under a connecting arch, and the remaining solid masonry

between the heads and beneath the connecting arch being perforated, say in a circular form, gave rise to tracery and larger windows, such as we find in the succeeding style. The foliage seen in the capitals of the Early English style is free and crisp, entirely conventional, and the leaves are for the most part trefoils, very bold and much undercut. The ornament most common and characteristic is what is absurdly called the “dog-tooth ornament,” of which fig. 26 is one of the varieties.



FIG. 26.

You may find Early English buildings without this ornament, but wherever you do find it you may safely ascribe that part of the building in which it occurs to this period. The zig-zag, you will remember, is a characteristic ornament of the Anglo-Norman style, and this dog-tooth is a growth from the same seed. A series of continuous notches cut on the edge of a square reveal, or pier, gives the first form of the dog-tooth.

The choir of the Temple Church, London, A.D. 1240, or the choir of Lincoln, or the transepts of York Cathedral, or the Chapter House at Lichfield, finished about 1250, will serve as examples of the style.

In the Decorated style, the windows afford the most striking characteristic: fig. 27 is an example.

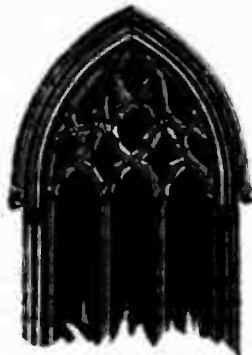


FIG. 27.—WINDOW, DECORATED PERIOD.

In the first instances the tracery is geometrical, presenting circles, quatrefoils, &c.; and the buildings containing these have been classed, as I said in my last, into a separate division, called the Geometrical; but in the perfect Decorated, which may be considered the culminating point of Gothic architecture, the tracery flows in wavy lines.

Triangular canopies with crockets and finials, niches on the face of the buttresses, and an ornament known as the “ball-flower” (fig. 28), are distinguishing characteristics.



FIG. 28.

All the buildings in this style, although called Decorated, are not more richly adorned than those of the previous and succeeding period; but in this style pinnacles floriated; saints, “sanctified in stone,” took their places beneath sculptured canopies; running foliage, curiously cut, grew up into the hollows of mouldings, and all the crowning elegancies of Gothic architecture were achieved.

You must not imagine, as many did at one time, that the architects of the middle ages worked without rules or guiding principles. The more fully our ancient edifices are studied, the more clearly does it become apparent that nothing was introduced unnecessarily or deceptively, for mere appearance’s sake: that the excellence of effect, which is apparent, resulted from the use of sound principles, laid down not with a view of producing that effect, but with reference to stability, convenience, and fitness; good taste and great skill being afterwards employed in adorning that which was necessary, and making the useful a producer of the beautiful. Plans were not made to accord with a fanciful elevation, entailing thereby loss of convenience, and unnecessary outlay, but were arranged first, to suit the requirements of the time, and upon these naturally the elevation followed. All decoration grew out of the construction, and reason governed instead of caprice. This is now better understood than it was a few years ago, and will doubtless produce its fruit in due season.

The choir of Ely cathedral; St. Andrew’s, Heckington; the choir of Wells, the nave of York, may serve as examples of the Decorated style.

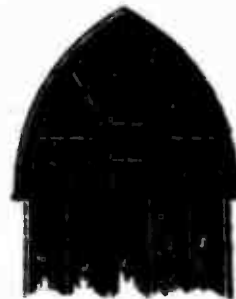


FIG. 29.—WINDOW, PERPENDICULAR PERIOD.

The most striking characteristic of the period which followed the Decorated, namely, the Perpendicular, is the arrangement of the tracery in perpendicular lines, which led to its name. Fig. 29, a window in this style, will explain this to you. You perceive the divisions, or mullions as they are called, run up straight from the sill to the head, instead of taking the flowing forms belonging to the Decorated. In this style panelling is very extensively used, and you will find the same upright arrangement in this as in the windows. Amongst its other peculiarities is the occasional use of a horizontal division in the windows, called a transom, dividing them into several heights; and another is the introduction of a horizontal moulding over the arch of doorways, creating a spandrel on each side of the arch, which is usually filled with carved ornaments, shields, or foliage. The arches in this style are flatter than in the preceding; and you will see that the tendency to verticality, which is the leading principle of pure Gothic, was disappearing, and that the abatement of the art was at hand.

The front of Westminster Hall will serve as an example of the style: look at it when you next pass it. The body of the exquisite church of St. Mary Redcliffe, at Bristol, the Divinity School, Oxford, and St. George’s Chapel,

* No. XII. See also pp. 100, 133, 164, 194, 236, 260, 262, 324, 366, 368, and 404.